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## REFORM IN INDIA

ON November 17, 1919, the Joint Committee of the Lords and Commons appointed to consider the Government of India Bill presented its report. The amendments it proposed to the bill were accepted *en bloc* by the Coalition Government, without the alteration of even a comma. The bill so amended passed the House of Commons on December 5 and, being approved by the House of Lords, became law before the Christmas holidays. This fact lends special weight to the report of the committee, in which are discussed not only the provisions of the bill but also the principles which should guide Parliament, the Secretary of State, the Government of India and the provincial governments under the new constitution. Though the constitution is avowedly a transitional one, and though, with a changed Government at Whitehall, its years may be even fewer than its authors anticipate, the report is yet a historical document of the first magnitude.

The key to the new policy was announced on August 20, 1917, by Mr. Montagu as Secretary of State, and this the committee has taken care to embody in the preamble to the act. The essential portions are as follows:

Whereas for the purpose of the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the Indian Administration, and the gradual development of self-governing institutions, with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible government in British India as an integral part of the Empire, it is expedient that substantial steps in this direction should be taken, and whereas progress in this direction can only be achieved by successive stages:

And whereas the time and manner of each advance can be determined only by Parliament, upon whom responsibility lies for the welfare and advancement of the Indian peoples:

The wording of the preamble has been closely scrutinized in India and not without reason. Though at first sight merely embodying that caution in advance and dislike of general prin-

ciples characteristic of the Englishman, it discloses on examination the clash between two opposing schools of thought. In "self-governing institutions" and "responsible government"—the keynotes—democracy speaks. But the modifying clauses kill all the grace and virtue of her speech. Such expressions as "gradual development" and "progressive realisation" may be used to excuse any delay, to stifle progress and to justify the most reactionary policy. They are expressions which have been on the lips of Indian bureaucracy for a century, and of their worth Indians have had ample opportunity of judging. Even less does the arrogation to Parliament of the time and manner of each advance savor of the spirit of liberty. In it we may recognize the voice of Lord Curzon, most overweening of Viceroy, whose chief claim to fame is that, by seeking to trample on new-born Indian nationalism, he quickened its growth a hundredfold and founded the Indian patriotism of to-day. As a matter of fact, the announcement of August 20 was framed not by Mr. Montagu but by Lord Curzon.

Contrast the preamble of this act with that of the United States law of 1914 for the government of the Philippines. Does not the former betray the authoritarian mind? Does it not breathe the spirit of the schoolmaster who permits some loosening of the bonds of discipline but warns his pupils that any further relaxation will depend on their good conduct, of which he himself is to be the sole judge? On the other side see the spirit of freedom, treating the Filipinos as equals, promising them complete independence and avowing that the object of the law is but to enable them better to enjoy that independence. Section 3 of the United States law contains provisions of the last importance in the nature of a declaration of rights. In the Indian act no such provisions occur. The omission is intentional. Would not a declaration of rights destroy arbitrary power? Would it not cut at the root of the Rowlatt Act, the Press Act, the Meetings Act and a host of other like restrictions under which India now groans? Today, though there may be freedom for the British in India, there is none for the Indian. "I will trust the people with the custody of their liberty", said Charles I, "but I will trust no people with the

custody of any liberty other than their own, whether that people be Rome, Athens or Britain." That truth is as yet ungrasped by the British Parliament.

The Indian act hinges on the scheme of dyarchy for the provincial governments. By this plan the functions of government are divided into two classes, reserved and transferred. The reserved subjects remain under the control of the governor and his executive council of four. Two of the councillors will be Indians, but, since the governor will nominate them, they will not be influenced by the legislative assembly and may easily be entirely out of sympathy with it. The transferred subjects will be in charge of Indian ministers nominated by the governor from the assembly and possessing the confidence of the majority of its members. Ministers and councillors will meet in consultation, but each will be responsible only for his own department. Where their views clash, the governor will act as arbitrator. He will decide on the allocation of funds to the different departments. In certain cases he may override the assembly. Obviously such duties will demand a high degree of tact, firmness and sympathy with democratic ideas. Of the legislative assemblies not less than 70 per cent are to be elected, and not more than 20 per cent are to be officials. But the Southborough Committee, which dealt with the composition of the assemblies and with the franchise, was greatly influenced by the officials, now as always hostile to democracy. The franchise it recommended would include only 5 per cent of the population and would leave wholly unrepresented the working classes, who in Bombay and elsewhere work and live under terrible conditions. This matter the Joint Committee has rightly referred back for further report. Unfortunately, it has accepted the equally unstatesmanlike report of the Functions Committee, which limits the transferred subjects to education, sanitation and some minor departments and leaves with the officials the important item of land revenue. The Indian National Congress and the Moslem League have declared for complete provincial autonomy.

The Government of India, the citadel of bureaucracy, remains in effect unshaken. True, the act sets up an Assembly

of 120 members, 80 to be elected, and a Council of State of 60 members, not more than 20 of whom shall be officials. At least three members of the Executive Council, less than half, will be Indians, but Indians nominated by the Viceroy, not responsible to the people. And the Viceroy, overriding the Assemblies, may sanction any expenditure and pass any law he considers fit. He therefore retains in full the arbitrary powers which he has exercised hitherto by means of the official *bloc*. In the important matter of the budget it is recommended that when the Viceroy and Assemblies agree, the Secretary of State shall not set their views aside; and since the fiscal policy of India has been ordered up to now not in the interests of that country but of Great Britain, this recommendation marks a real step in advance.

The final constitution of India will and must be a federation, though the states of the federation may differ from the existing provinces. Of such a federation the Council of State now set up may easily form the Senate and the Legislative Assembly the House of Representatives. But for the moment this question is untouched. Because federation implies real autonomy and freedom from official control, officials look askance at the idea, using the awkward word "central" instead of federal to describe the Simla Government. Indians, on the other hand, are intent on developing the new-born sense of national unity and patriotism. They wish to weld and knit together the differing peoples of India, to lower the barriers dividing province from province. But national unity once firmly established, they will certainly resolve on a federal constitution, the only constitution that gives scope for local life, local initiative and local patriotism.

The constitution framed by the committee and passed by the Coalition Government is in several respects in advance of the original proposals of the Montagu-Chelmsford Report. Why is this? Why should a committee the majority of whom were Conservatives, and a Government which is in reality though not in name a Conservative Government—a party that has ever upheld authority and hated freedom—have stood in this matter of the Indian constitution for real progress? What,

too, was the reason for the strange haste with which the measure was pushed through Parliament? The answer is that it was a question of expediency. India was dangerously disturbed, seething with discontent; it was expedient, nay imperative, to apply quick palliatives. The delay in fulfilling the promise of August 20 had indeed fostered discontent, but it was not that discontent which spurred on the committee and the Government. Deeper matters agitated the Indian mind; fierce currents surged beneath the surface. India during the war had remained loyal to the British flag. Believing that the war was waged for liberty, for justice and for the rights of peoples to govern themselves, she supported freely the cause of the Allies with men and food and, so far as her poverty allowed, with money. For reward she received the Rowlatt Act. This act, which aimed to perpetuate the arbitrary powers exercised during the war, came to India as a slap in the face. Every man felt himself in fetters, his future progress threatened, himself and his belongings at the mercy of officials and informers. After the act had been passed by the Legislative Council, in the teeth of the opposition of all its Indian members, an agitation against it sprang up throughout the country. The chief form that this agitation took was *Satyagraha* or passive resistance, a movement led by Mr. Gandhi, a man revered throughout India as a saint. There was in it nothing seditious, nothing dangerous to public order. But officialdom saw danger where no danger was. In the Punjab, already disturbed by the despotism of the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Michael O'Dwyer, two popular leaders were interned, whilst Mr. Gandhi, who was coming to smooth matters over, was suddenly turned back. At Amritsar a crowd of peaceful petitioners was fired on by troops. The people were infuriated; they killed two Europeans; they burnt buildings. Two days of peace followed, and then General Dyer perpetrated the shocking massacre at the Jallianwallah Bagh. A quiet crowd, assembled to denounce outrage, was butchered by rifle fire without a shadow of warning or of provocation. When the troops had exhausted their cartridges, 500 dead and dying men littered the ground, and 1500 wounded were left uncared-for and untended. Never be-

fore, except in Ireland, has the British name been sullied by a crime so black. Other, if minor atrocities, followed elsewhere in the Punjab, where for a time there ruled a reign of terror. The Indian Government not only condoned all these atrocities, but it suppressed by every means in its power a knowledge of the facts. When, against its will, the Hunter Commission—an inadequate and partial commission—was sent out to inquire, it hastened to pass an act of indemnity to shield the perpetrators. But though no overt reference to the horrors of the Punjab pierced the mist of the censorship, word of what had been done passed through India, and there welled up a hatred of the British such as had never before been known. Simla was alarmed and with reason. It became expedient not only to appease the popular discontent but to appease it quickly. The National Congress was due to meet at this very town of Amritsar on December 27. It was essential that when met it should find in being a liberal measure of reform. Hence the unexpected improvement in the original scheme, hence, too, the speed with which Government hastened to translate its measure into law. Incredible as it may seem, it was not till after the India Bill had passed the House of Commons that the Amritsar massacre became known to the British public. Otherwise even the present House might have repudiated the doctrine that Simla is “responsible” to London alone and not to the people of India.

The National Congress met at Amritsar. It was a wonderful meeting, a land-mark in the history of India. Though the speakers were righteously indignant at the atrocities in the Punjab, their indignation was tempered by statesmanship and a breadth of view that augurs well for the future. They condemned the crimes of the government but they condemned also the outrages by the mob. Resolutions were passed demanding the recall of Lord Chelmsford and an impartial inquiry into the conduct of Sir Michael O'Dwyer, General Dyer and others responsible for the reign of terror. Though the reforms were characterized as inadequate, it was agreed to cooperate in working them. Finally the Congress declared for complete provincial autonomy, dyarchy in the Government of India and a

Declaration of Rights. In these resolutions the Moslem League, at a separate meeting, concurred.

A dramatic incident interrupted the sittings of the Congress—the arrival of the Ali brothers and of other political suspects who had been interned under *lettres de cachet*. They were welcomed with tears of joy and thankfulness. A statesmanlike order of the King—pleasantly described in the Anglo-Indian press as a stab in the back for the Viceroy by the Secretary of State—had procured the release of the great majority of these victims of despotic rule as well as the cancellation of numerous securities under the Press Act. Since the passing of this act in 1910, 350 presses and 300 newspapers have been penalized, 500 publications proscribed, security to the extent of over £40,000 demanded—think what that means in a poor country like India—whilst 200 presses and 130 newspapers have been prevented from starting. This order of the King has done much to appease Indian opinion, exasperated to a dangerous pitch by the Punjab atrocities and by official repression. It has smoothed the way for the reforms. But, as at the time of the American Stamp Act, England has relaxed her rule on the ground of expediency. The principle remains; the coercion acts have not been repealed. The Government still retains those tyrannical powers which it has used to its own dishonor and to the lasting injury of the Indian people.

So with a burst of sunshine ended the year 1919, a year memorable in India for the Punjab atrocities, the Reform Act and the Amritsar meeting of the Congress; memorable still more for the marvellous growth in Indian unity and Indian patriotism. Dissensions have broken out between the main or Nationalist Party and the Moderates, led by Mrs. Besant. The two parties differ chiefly in this, that, whereas the Nationalists denounce the reforms as inadequate and demand self-government as a matter of right, the Moderates hail them thankfully as a boon and are eager to cooperate with the officials. The latter have not been slow to meet these advances. On the important committee nominated to frame rules under the Reform Act no member of the Nationalist party, but only Moderates, have been appointed.

Apart from these dissensions the Khilafat agitation has illumined the growing sense of unity between Hindus and Mohammedans. The future of the Kalifa is a purely religious question; it interests, moves and inflames only the followers of Islam. Yet the Hindus have throughout sympathized deeply with their fellow citizens; they have supported them, helped them, indeed have acted almost as if it were a tenet of their own religion which was at stake. That is a fact for the wise to ponder. It is no longer possible to govern India, as Sir B. Fuller and others hoped, on the principle of *divide et imperâ*, to play off Mohammedan against Hindu. India is one.

The report of the Hunter Commission, the Dyer debates in the House of Commons, and still more the support of General Dyer by the great majority of the white population in India have had grave results. As by a lightning flash Indians have beheld the real mind of those who rule them and of their sympathizers in Britain. The report is looked on as so much white-wash. Confidence in British justice is weakened, faith in the goodwill of Simla destroyed, and a wall of hatred set up between the two races.

During the autumn of the year events in India have taken a new and ominous course. The breach of faith in the treaty imposed on Turkey, the failure to redress the Punjab outrages, the language used by many English both in India and England, and especially in the Houses of Parliament, concerning those outrages, the manifest intention of the Government of India in the rules framed under the act to retain as far as possible all power in the hands of the officials, together with the nomination of civilians to four out of the five new governorships and as presidents of all the councils—these facts have broken the faith of most Indians in British justice. This feeling Mr. Gandhi has crystallized in the non-cooperation movement, a movement similar in scope and aim to that of Sinn Fein in Ireland, but resolved to avoid scrupulously all acts of violence. The intention is to boycott not merely the new councils, but by a series of graduated measures, the British government itself, and, by rendering its rule impossible, to compel it to accede to the demands of the people. At a special meeting of the In-

dian National Congress held at Calcutta under the presidency of Lajpat Rai, Mr. Gandhi's motion was carried by a large majority on September 10. The speeches struck a sterner and more resolute note than any heretofore. At the moment of writing none can say how far the movement will go or what will be the result. One thing is certain. It is a decisive event in the history of India. By this revolution Indians have resolved to win their freedom not by the favor or with the assistance of the British government, but relying on themselves alone, their numbers, their organization, their self-sacrifice, their courage and their patriotism.

What of the future? Will the reforms work well in practice? Will they satisfy the Indian people? The omens are not good. Admittedly they do not content the great majority of organized opinion, nor is it very likely that their working will greatly assuage the heart-burnings and soften the bitterness so widely felt today. Much will depend on the governors. They are the keystone of the new edifice of political reform. If they side too much with the officials, if they flout or ignore popular opinion, feeling will again run high, and feeling in India must now be taken into account very seriously. Three hundred million human beings are politically awake and have begun to move. They may be guided, controlled by sympathy and statesmanship, but they cannot be checked without disaster. Will the great body of the Civil Service show a new mind and work the new constitution in a democratic spirit? It seems unlikely. Their whole training is not democratic but authoritarian. They turn their eyes to the past for precedents; they are blind to the warnings of the present and fearful of a future of self-government. Already Simla has given a hint of its intentions in the appointment of the Rules Committee. It intends to throw itself into the arms of the Moderates, to spurn the Nationalists who form the great majority of the Indian people. Still more significant is the budget for 1920-1. A year and a half after the end of the war the Government sets aside £40,000,000 out of a total of £90,500,000 for the army. It alleges the need for new equipment. But that is not the real reason. The real reason is that it fears the people and hopes

to overawe them by artillery, tanks, aeroplanes and great munitions of war. Fear is the mainspring of the Government's policy. It is based on fear, inspired by fear, bound by fear. Is that the spirit which can meet the problems of modern India with any hope of success? It is the old bureaucratic spirit, the spirit of privilege and precedent and aloofness from popular wishes and hopes. No protestations, no "camouflage" will alter this essential fact.

Against this government of privilege, resting on bayonets, stand the embattled peoples of India, united, confident, inspired. For leaders they have statesmen of the first rank, such as Lajpat Rai, Patel, the Ali brothers and a host of others. India is at heart the most peaceful country on earth, and therefore the struggle will be peaceful. But struggle there will be. If a Labor Ministry succeeds the present Coalition (really Conservative) Government in England, the conflict will be short. Otherwise it may linger on through years of agitation, disaffection, compromise and growing popular power. The end is certain.

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